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## Library Strategies for Meeting the Learning Needs of Fine Arts Students in the 21st Century: The Experience of New Asia College Ch'ien Mu Library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong

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# **LIBRARY STRATEGIES FOR MEETING THE LEARNING NEEDS OF FINE ARTS STUDENTS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE EXPERIENCE OF NEW ASIA COLLEGE CH'IENT MU LIBRARY OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

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## **Abstract**

Being the only university to adopt a college system in Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong has at present nine constituent colleges, one of which is New Asia College. Compared to the other colleges, New Asia College has strong emphasis on the arts and humanities in general and on the traditional Chinese culture in particular. The Ch'ien Mu Library of New Asia College houses an extensive collection of fine arts to support the academic curriculum of the Department of Fine Arts located in the same campus of the College. In terms of the library collections, facilities and services, this paper discusses the strategies adopted by the Library in providing user-centered library services in order to meet the learning needs of the fine arts students. Apart from analyzing the subject coverage and the usage activities of the fine arts collection, the author introduces the Local Arts Archive – a physical collection of Hong Kong art material – as well as a recently launched Hong Kong Visual Arts Archive – an online searchable database on visual arts information in Hong Kong – developed by the Library. Aiming to facilitate the learning process of the fine arts students, the Library provides a physical exhibition space to showcase the art works of the students inside the library building. These student exhibitions are widely publicized through traditional and social networking tools set up by the Library. To further enhance student learning, the Library launched orientation seminars for the first year fine arts students of both undergraduate and MA postgraduate programmes starting from the 2011/12 academic year.

**Keywords:** Fine Arts; Library Services; Ch'ien Mu Library; New Asia College; The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## **Introduction**

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there has been a major shift in the role of the library from a place of acquiring information to a place of learning[1]. What are the implications for academic libraries in such transformation process? How can academic libraries remain relevant in a knowledge-based environment? In this paper, the author uses the case of Ch'ien Mu Library of New Asia College to share the experience of providing user-centered library services in order to meet the learning needs of fine arts students in The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

## **The Chinese University of Hong Kong: New Asia College and Ch'ien Mu Library**

The CUHK was established in 1963 by combining the then three post-secondary colleges, namely New Asia College (founded in 1949), Chung Chi College (founded in 1951) and The United College of Hong Kong (founded in 1956). In the past half century, six more colleges were set up to fulfill the fast changing needs of higher education in Hong Kong. These six colleges are Shaw College (founded in 1986), Morningside College (founded in 2006), S.H. Ho College (founded in 2006), C.W. Chu College (founded in 2007), Lee Woo Shing College (founded in 2007) and Wu Yee Sun College (founded in 2007). The CUHK is "a forward looking comprehensive research university with a global vision and a mission to combine tradition with modernity, and to bring together China and the West" (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012). In 2011, there were 14,431 students (11,328 undergraduates and 3,103 postgraduates) and 1,466 teaching staff in eight faculties, and 381 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the CUHK[2].

Being the only university to adopt a college system in Hong Kong, the CUHK provides not only formal curriculum offered by faculties and departments but also a congenial environment which encourages intimate interaction among teachers, students and alumni. The college system can complement the formal curriculum to deliver whole-person education and pastoral care. New Asia College was founded in 1949 by the late Dr. Ch'ien Mu and other scholars from mainland China. The mission of the College is "to combine the essence of the scholarship of the Song and Ming academies and the tutorial system of Western universities" (New Asia College, 2011, p.16). Aiming at preserving traditional Chinese culture and balancing it with Western learning, students get acquaintance with their cultural heritage while being able to cope with the challenges of the modern world. As compared to other colleges in the CUHK, New Asia College has a strong emphasis on arts and humanities in general and on the traditional Chinese culture in particular.

Prior to the establishment of the CUHK, each of the three constituent colleges always had its own library. Chung Chi Library, New Asia College Library and The United College Library were established in 1951, 1954 and 1956 respectively serving their own library users separately[3]. In

a proposal for reviewing the development of these three college libraries, the University Library System (ULS) came into being after the establishment of the CUHK in Shatin in 1963. Two years later, the University Library was set up to serve the then newly founded CUHK. In the past five decades, three subject libraries, namely Li Ping Medical Library (founded in 1980), Architecture Library (founded in 1994) and Lee Quo Wei Law Library (found in 2004), were set up to serve the then newly established Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Architecture and Faculty of Law (University Library System of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007, pp.6-19).

The ULS plays a key role in coordinating the collections and services of the University Library and the six branch libraries. In terms of collection management, the ULS currently adopts the LC Classification System and NLM Scheme to manage its collections among seven libraries. As of 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, there were more than 2.4 million volumes of books and bound periodicals, 2.2 million e-books, and ten thousand e-journals (University Library System of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2011, pp. 4-7). The library collections are distributed according to the Subject Oriented Library Scheme, which divides stocks into broad subject areas by location as indicated in the table below: (Figure 1)

<b>Library</b>	<b>Subjects</b>
<b>University Library</b>	Science and Engineering, Social Sciences and Business
<b>Chung Chi College Elisabeth Luce Moore Library</b>	Education, Music, and Religious Studies
<b>New Asia College Ch'ien Mu Library</b>	Chinese Literature, Fine Arts and Philosophy
<b>United College Wu Chung Multimedia Library</b>	Multimedia Library
<b>Architecture Library</b>	Buildings Industry and Environmental Sciences
<b>Lee Quo Wei Law Library</b>	Law

Figure 1. ULS Subject Oriented Library Scheme

It is worth-noting that the fine arts collection is currently housed in Ch'ien Mu Library of New Asia College and will be discussed in more details in the following sections.

## **Fine Arts Programmes and Curriculum**

In 1957, Department of Fine Arts launched a two-year curriculum of study, initially known as Fine Arts Specialized Training Programme, at New Asia College. Two years later, the Department started to offer a four-year undergraduate programme and was the first tertiary institute in Hong Kong to provide courses on studio practice and history of visual arts. Since then, it has always been the aim of the Department to nurture artistic talents with rich general

knowledge by offering programmes with art theory, studio practice, and training of literature, history and philosophy. The Department has endeavored to promote the study of Chinese art and culture, and the exchange of Chinese and Western art since its very beginning. The emphasis on Chinese art and culture can be reflected by the establishment of two major postgraduate programmes on Chinese art, namely an M.Phil programme in History of Chinese Art in 1981 and a Ph.D. programme in History of Chinese Art in 1992. In 1993, the Department also offered an M.F.A. programme on creative art, which was the first of its kind among tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. In order to provide a platform for professional development of individual artist, the Department introduced a part-time M.A. programme in Fine Arts in 2009 (Department of Fine Arts of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012).

In terms of curriculum design, the Department offers a comprehensive and balanced undergraduate programme which focuses on Chinese art in a global context. It emphasizes on both the practice and the history of art, and prepares students for careers in the arts. Students enrolled in the programme are divided into three main streams: Art History with emphasis on Chinese art, Modern Art Studio, and Art History and Art Studio. Apart from theoretical studies, the Department puts a lot of emphasis on studio art works. For students of Modern Arts Studio stream, and Art History and Art Studio stream, they have to submit studio works for exhibition and pass an oral examination which accounts for 30% toward honours classification.

While the Department offers a wide range of study and research areas on both Eastern and Western art traditions, the postgraduate programmes have strong emphasis on Chinese art as indicated in the respective fields of specialization below: (Figure 2)

MA in Fine Arts	fields of specialization including painting, sculpture, mixed media, Chinese painting and calligraphy
Master of Fine Arts	fields of specialization including painting, sculpture and mixed media, Chinese painting, calligraphy and seal carving
M.Phil/Ph.D in History of Chinese Arts	fields of specialization including histories and theories of Chinese painting and calligraphy, jades, bronzes, ceramics, religious art and contemporary Chinese art

Figure 2. Fields of Specialization of Postgraduate Programmes

In addition to academic research, students enrolled in MA in Fine Arts programme and Master of Fine Arts programme have to submit their own studio art works as part of their curriculum requirement.

In recent years, the Department has been engaged in research projects related to the study and development of Hong Kong art including “A Study of Hong Kong Art since 1911”, the compilation of the *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook* (1999-2000; 2003-2011), “A Study of Calligraphy in Twentieth-Century Hong Kong”, “Script Writing for the Learning and Teaching Materials on ‘Undertaking Hong Kong Art through Hong Kong Culture’”, “Chronology of Hong

Kong Calligraphy 1901-1950”, and “Collecting Chinese Art in Hong Kong: A Global Phenomenon”. (Appendix One) Furthermore, the Department offers courses on Hong Kong art such as “In Pursuit of Hong Kong Art and Culture”, “Art in HK: From the Foundation of the Colony to the Early 21st Century”, “Special Topic in Hong Kong Art”, etc. Thus, there is a demand for Hong Kong art materials to support the learning, teaching and research activities of the Department.

## Library Strategies for Meeting the Learning Needs

In order to meet the learning needs of fine arts students in the CUHK, Ch'ien Mu Library adopts strategies in terms of library collections, facilities and services that can provide user-centered library services. Strategically, the Library develops a comprehensive fine arts collection with a strong focus on Chinese art, sets up a Local Arts Archive to collect print materials on Hong Kong art, develops an online database on Hong Kong visual arts information, provides an exhibition space to mount the studio art works of the students, and organizes library orientation seminars for fine arts students.

### 1. Fine Arts Collection: Print and Online

Since the Department of Fine Arts of the CUHK was the first tertiary institute in Hong Kong to offer formal education programmes on studio practice and history of visual arts, the fine arts resources in Ch'ien Mu Library is one of the most significant collections in Hong Kong in terms of size, historical and academic values. In total, there are more than 56,000 volumes of fine arts titles in the Library comprising visual arts, sculpture, drawing & design, painting, print media, decorative arts, etc. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the fine arts collection in which Painting (41%), Visual Arts (23%) and Decorative Arts (20%) are the three biggest sub-collections in the Library.

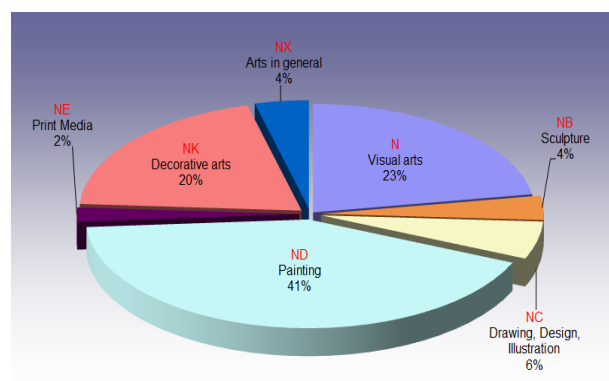


Figure 3. Distribution of Fine Arts Collection

One of the major features of the programmes and curriculum offered by the Department Fine Arts is a strong emphasis on Chinese art. Accordingly, the Library develops a strong collection of Chinese art in order to support the teaching and learning needs of the Department. As indicated in Figure 4 below, Chinese art titles account for more than 46% of the entire fine arts collection of the Library:

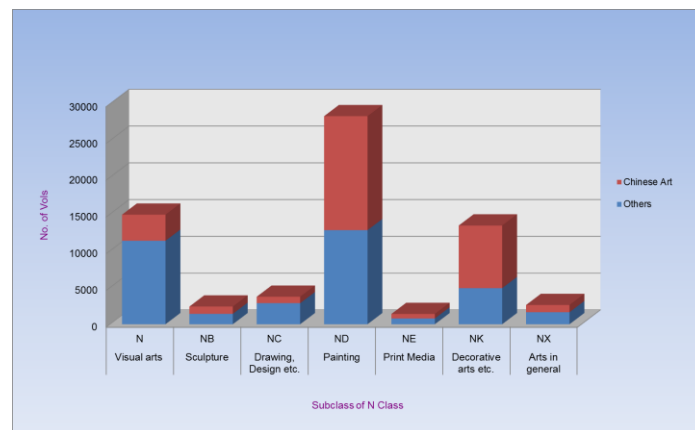


Figure 4. Proportion of Chinese Art Titles

Figure 5 shows the cumulative usage statistics of the fine arts collection since the implementation of INNOPAC in 1995. Comparing Figure 4 and 5, the results indicate clearly that there is a correlation between collection size and usage, i.e., the larger the collection, the more frequent it was used.

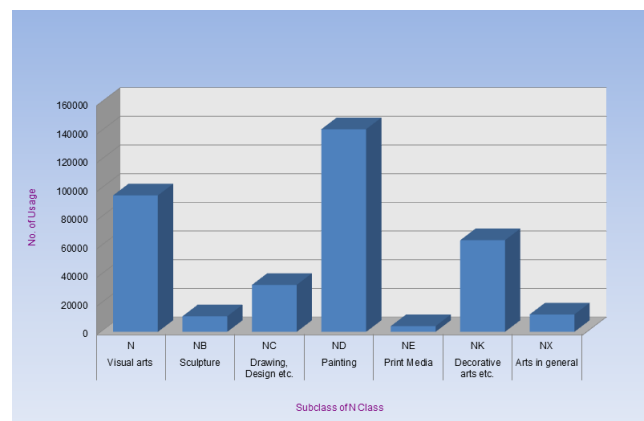


Figure 5. Cumulative Usage of Fine Arts Collection

Apart from building up a comprehensive fine arts collection, the Library also sets up a Local Art Archive in 2003 to cater for the research, teaching and learning activities on Hong Kong art. The Archive includes monographs, journal articles, pamphlets, newspaper cutting, exhibition catalogues, invitation cards and samples of artworks such as seal carving. It has become one of the major resources for the study and research on local artists and art activities. Currently, there are more than 2,490 volumes of monographs on local art and artists. (Figure 6)

Eastern Language Books		Western Language Books	
Title	Volume	Title	Volume
1,542	2,036	354	454

Figure 6. Collection Size of Local Art Archive

To facilitate the research of local art in Hong Kong, the Library launched an online database entitled Hong Kong Visual Arts Archive (HKVAA) in 2010. (Figure 7) It provides users with easy access to Hong Kong visual arts and artist materials for teaching and research purposes. As far as functionality is concerned, it provides three search modes, namely keyword, basic and advanced search, and links to major resources on Hong Kong art including arts database, arts schools, arts groups and organizations, and arts museum and galleries. (Figure 8)



Figure 7. HKVAA Home Page



Figure 8. A Sample Record of HKVAA

## 2. Exhibition Space

As mentioned earlier, as part of the curriculum requirement, undergraduate students (enrolled in Modern Art Studio stream, and Art History and Art Studio stream) and postgraduate students of Master of Arts Programme in Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts Programme have to submit art works for exhibition. Thus, there is a pressing demand for exhibition space within the university campus. In response to this emerging need, Ch'ien Mu Library converted the Mezzanine Floor and part of the Second Floor into an Exhibition Gallery during the major refurbishment of the Library in 2003-2004. (Figure 9) In the past eight years, the Exhibition Gallery was used intensively and, in total, 136 exhibitions were mounted there.





Figure 9. Exhibition Gallery of the Library

Apart from fulfilling the demand for exhibition space from fine arts students, there are other benefits of bringing this facility to the Library. First, it creates a culturally enriched environment by exhibiting art works in the Library. This kind of library environment provides a welcoming experience for users. Second, the provision of exhibition space increases the presence of the Library in the university community as well as in the general public. The exhibitions mounted in the Library are widely publicized through traditional and social networking tools including the *Newsletter of the New Asia College*, *Embark*[4], University Home Page, the Library's Exhibition Web Page and Blogging with NAL[5]. Very often, these prospective artists include their previous exhibitions in their portfolios in developing their professional careers. The artist's portfolio is an indirect but enduring way to bring the Library to a wider audience. Third, these exhibitions increase the patronage of the Library by attracting more audience from not only the university community but also the general public.

### 3. Library Orientation Seminars

To further enhance student learning, the Library launched two brand new orientation seminars for fine arts students starting from the 2011/12 academic year, one for the first year undergraduate students and another one for the first year MA postgraduate students. Designed at different academic levels, these two seminars, broadly speaking, covered the following four major topics: general library services, print collection on fine arts, electronic resources on fine arts, and exhibition facilities in the Library. In addition, a case study on a specific topic on fine arts was discussed in class so that students could learn how to use electronic resources on fine arts effectively. After the class, students were invited to complete a questionnaire. The response from the students was very encouraging. When the first year undergraduate students were asked to rate the content of the seminar, 19 students (76%) of the respondents replied that the seminar was "acceptable" and 5 students (24%) regarded it as "easy". (Figure10)

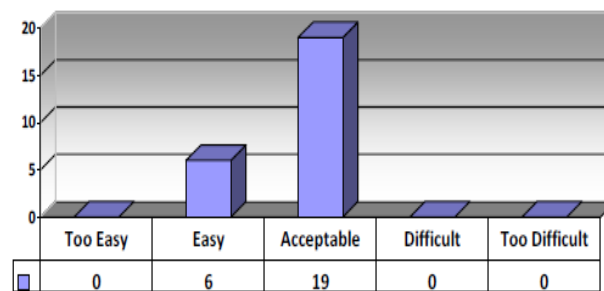


Figure 10. Rating of the Content of the Orientation Seminar.

## Concluding Remarks

In this paper, the author uses Ch'ien Mu Library as an example to review the strategies adopted by the Library in providing user-centered library services to fine arts students in the CUHK. It is very important for the Library to understand the programme structure and curriculum requirement of the faculty, in order to provide focused library collections, user-oriented facilities and tailor-made services that can facilitate the learning activities of the students and enrich their learning experience.

## Notes

1. There are quite a few articles on the debate of the library as a place of learning. For example, Watson, L. (2010), "The future of the library as a place of learning: a personal perspective", *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 16, pp. 45-56; Sennyey, P., Ross, L. and Mills, C. (2009), "Exploring the future of academic libraries: a definitional approach", *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 35 No.3, pp.252-259; Frayling, C. (2007), "The new Bauhaus: an art education for the 21st Century", *Art Libraries Journal*, Vol.32 No.1, pp.31-36; Hapke, T. (2005), "In-formation of better learning environments - the educational role of the university library", *Liber Quarterly: The Journal of European Research Libraries*, Vol.15 No.3, available at : <http://search.proquest.com/docview/57679855?accountid=10371> (accessed 28 April 2012).
2. The student figures only represent those enrolled in publicly funded programmes. Students enrolled in self-financed programmes are excluded.
3. Chung Chi College Library, New Asia College Library and the United College Library were later re-named as Chung Chi College Elisabeth Luce Moore Library, New Asia College Ch'ien Mu Library and the United College Wu Chung Multimedia Library respectively.

4. *Embark* is a monthly newsletter published by the Office of the Arts Administrator of The Chinese University of Hong Kong to promote arts activities in the university campus.
5. Blogging with NAL is a social networking service offered by Ch'ien Mu Library in 2010.

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## Appendix One

Publicly-funded research projects on Hong Kong Art by the Department of Fine Arts of The Chinese University of Hong Kong:

1. "A Study of Hong Kong Art since 1911" (Earmarked Grant, University Grant Committee, Hong Kong. Principal Investigator: Kao Mayching. 1994-98)
2. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 1999" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2000)
3. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2000" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2000-01)
4. "A Study of Calligraphy in Twentieth-Century Hong Kong" (Earmarked Grant, University Grant Committee, Hong Kong. Principal Investigator: Harold Mok and Cheung Wai Yee. Since 2002)
5. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2003" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2003)
6. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2004" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2004)
7. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2005" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2005)
8. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2006" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Kurt Chan. 2006)
9. "Script Writing for the Learning and Teaching Materials on "Undertaking Hong Kong Art through Hong Kong Culture" (Commissioned Project, Education and Manpower Bureau, Hong Kong. Investigator: Vigneron Frank Joseph Emmanuel. 2006)
10. "Chronology of Hong Kong Calligraphy 1901-1950" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Harold Mok and Chen Yafei. 2007)
11. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2007" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts

Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Kurt Chan, Harold Mok and Maggie Wan. 2008)

12. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2008" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Kurt Chan, Maggie Wan and Lam Ka Man. 2008)

13. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2009" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Kurt Chan, Lam Ka Man and Chan Lai Kuen. 2009)

14. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2010" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Tong Kam Tang, Lam Ka Man and Chan Lai Kuen 2010)

15. "Collecting Chinese Art in Hong Kong: A Global Phenomenon" (Embarked Grant, University Grant Committee, Hong Kong. Principal Investigators: So Jenny Fong Suk, Siu Fung Har, Helen and Tang Lin Yun. 2010)

16. "Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2011" (Commissioned Project, Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Hong Kong. Investigators: Tong Kam Tang. 2011)